

Holbein's *Whitehall Mural* for Henry VIII:

Spacing a Place for the King

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In 1529, Henry VIII (1491–1547) acquired York Place, a magnificent London residence located directly by the river Thames, in the wake of the political downfall of the estate's previous owner, Cardinal Thomas Wolsey.¹ The surrender of the cardinal's property to the Crown coincided with Henry's increasing interest in architecture during the late 1520s, and the king – presumably influenced by his mistress and later second wife Anne Boleyn – immediately embarked on plans for large-scale alterations to the palace to match his own personal and official requirements.² The Venetian ambassador commented on the king's activities in one of his reports of 1531 that:

his Majesty is now staying at Greenwich, and often comes to Westminster, having designed [*designato*, sic!] new lodgings there, and a park adjoining York House, which belonged to the late Cardinal Wolsey. The plan [*designo*, sic!] is on so large a scale that many hundreds of houses will be levelled.³

The ambassador was by no means exaggerating the extent of the project. Over the next few years, dozens of properties near the former episcopal see were demolished to make room for the royal palace.⁴ By 1534, the complex not only consisted of the hugely enlarged and altered former lodgings of Cardinal Wolsey but also of a vast recreational area, including four tennis courts, two bowling alleys, a cockpit, a pheasant-yard and a tiltyard with a gallery for spectators.⁵ In 1536, York Place was declared the principal residence of the King of England by an Act of Parliament and was named 'Kynge's Paleys at Westminster', but it was then (and still is) usually referred to as Whitehall Palace (fig. 1).⁶

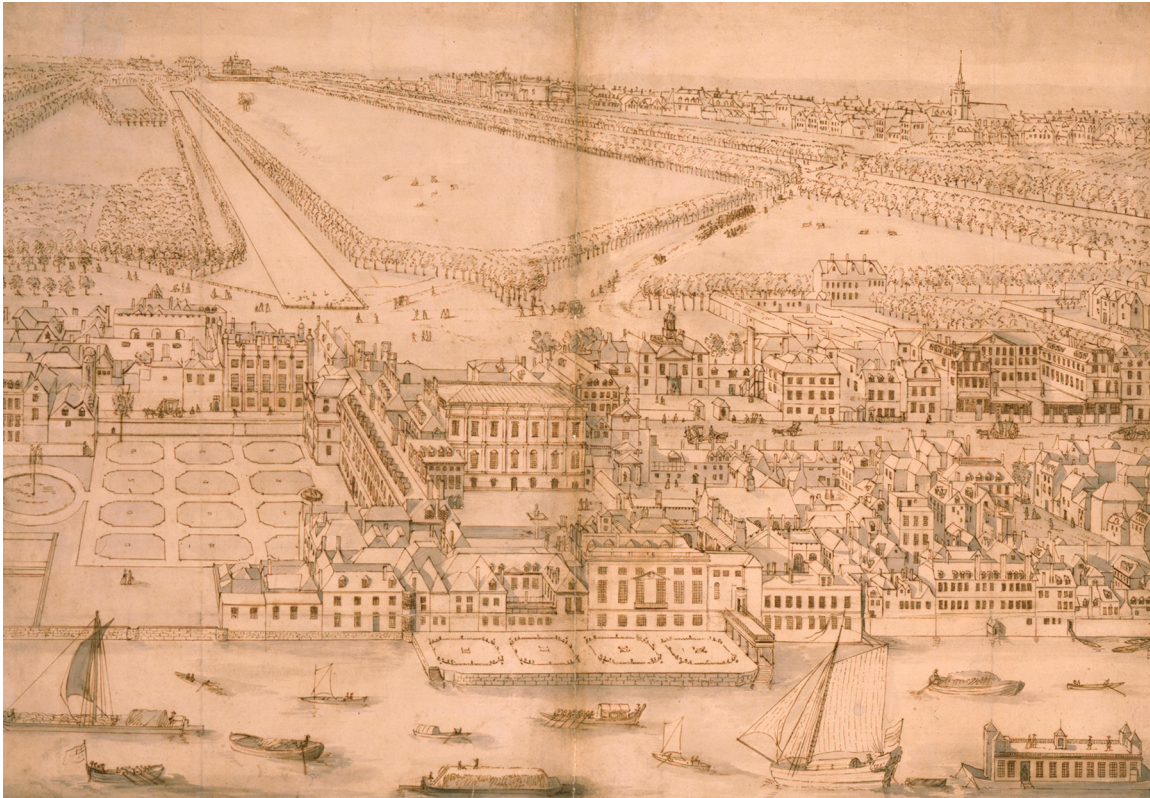


Fig. 1 Leonard Knyff, *Aerial View of Whitehall*, London, c. 1695–1697.

By this time, Whitehall had become and was to remain one of the largest and most extravagant palaces in Europe. When the Moravian nobleman Baron Waldstein visited Whitehall in July 1600, he wrote:

we then went on into the nearby palace, the royal residence known as Whitehall, i.e. White Hall. It is truly majestic, bounded on the one side by a park which adjoins another palace which is called St. James's, and on the other side by the Thames, and it is a place which fills one with wonder, not so much because of its great size as because of the magnificence of its bed chambers and living rooms which are furnished with the most gorgeous splendour.⁷

Unfortunately, only little of the palace's splendour survived the fire of January 1698, when only Inigo Jones's Banqueting House (1619–1622) remained untouched.⁸ Thus, historical research on the Henrician layout of Whitehall has to rely mostly on archaeological findings and on documentary evidence such as eyewitness reports or the palace's inventory.

The Whitehall Mural

A small oil painting by the Flemish artist Remigius van Leemput, commissioned by Charles II (1630–1685) in 1667 (fig. 2) constitutes one of the most important pieces of documentary evidence. It

depicts the so-called *Whitehall Mural* by Hans Holbein the Younger, a monumental wall painting designed for the king's lodgings in the palace, and shows Henry VIII with his third wife Jane Seymour (1509–1537) and with his parents Henry VII (1457–1509) and Elizabeth of York (1465–1503).



Fig. 2 Remigius van Leemput, *Copy of the Whitehall Mural*, London, 1667.

Against a backdrop of palatial architecture, the royal family stands on two tiers of a low pedestal to the left and right of an altar-like block of stone, which bears a Latin inscription. The lower part of the inscription gives an account of the date and content of the copy and explains that the original had been designed by Holbein on a much larger scale. Charles II is mentioned as having commissioned the copy and Remigius van Leemput is credited as the executing artist.⁹ The translated upper part of the inscription reads as follows:

If it pleases you to see the illustrious images of heroes
Look on these: no picture ever bore greater.
The great debate, competition and great question is
Whether father or son is the victor. For both indeed were supreme.
The former often overcame his enemies and the conflagrations of his country,
and finally brought peace to its citizens.
The son, born indeed for greater things,
removed the unworthy from their altars and replaced them by upright men.
The arrogance of the Popes has yielded to unerring virtue
And while Henry VIII holds the scepter in his hand
religion is restored and during his reign
the doctrines of God have begun to be held in his honour.¹⁰

The authenticity of the copy and its relation with the original layout of the Holbein painting have been the subject of intense debate over the past decades. In the first extensive analysis of the original mural and of van Leemput's copy, Roy Strong argued that van Leemput had added the plinth and its inscription as a replacement for a piece of furnishing, around which he suspected the mural to have been created.¹¹ His thesis was partially based upon a description by Charles Patin who had visited Whitehall in 1671 and had commented on a portrait of Henry VIII 'and the princes, his children' on the 'gable of the window' ('*sur le pignon de la croisée*').¹² But, as Susan Foister rightly claimed in her 1981 PhD thesis, Patin could not have been talking about the *Whitehall Mural*, which shows Henry with his parents and not with his children. His account can be much more plausibly connected to a portrait of Henry VIII with the princes Mary, Edward and Elizabeth, now part of the Royal Collection (fig. 3).¹³



Fig. 3 British School, *Henry and his Children*, London, c.1545.

The strongest evidence in favour of the plinth's and the inscription's presence in Holbein's original composition is, however, the already-mentioned diary of Baron Waldstein. He described a room

in Queen Elizabeth's lodgings where 'Henry VII and VIII and their wives are painted',¹⁴ followed by a transcription corresponding almost exactly to the text in van Leemput's copy.¹⁵ The accuracy of the overall layout of the copy can – apart from the verses on the plinth – be further sustained by comparing it to the only surviving source from the hand of Hans Holbein the Younger himself, the *Whitehall Mural Cartoon* (fig. 4). The ink and watercolour drawing shows Henry VIII and his father Henry VII in the same pose and setting as depicted by van Leemput. The cartoon was used to transfer Holbein's design onto the plaster, as indicated by the prick marks along the outlines of the drawing.¹⁶ Its size (258 x 137 cm), therefore, corresponds to the actual proportions of the wall painting, which – based on these measurements – can be estimated to have been about 270 cm in height and 360 cm in width.¹⁷ There are, however, two significant differences between the copy by van Leemput and the Holbein cartoon.



Fig. 4 Hans Holbein the Younger, *Cartoon for the Whitehall Mural*, London, 1536–1537 (National Portrait Gallery).



Fig. 5 British School, *Portrait of Henry VIII copied from the Mural*, Petworth House, c. 1543–1547.

One difference is that in the seventeenth-century reproduction, the fields on the frieze above the niches that originally contained Henry's and Jane's initials H and I connected by a so called 'lover's knot' had been replaced by the letters 'AN.DO' on the left and by the date 1537 on the right. This detail is widely accepted as a clue towards establishing the precise date of the mural's completion: Holbein probably started the preparations for the painting after Henry's and Jane's marriage in May 1536 – most likely in the winter or spring of 1537, when the queen was pregnant with Henry's only legitimate male heir, Edward VI. Therefore, the change to the original design could be interpreted

as a commemoration of Jane's death during childbirth in October 1537.¹⁸ The second difference is equally significant – both for the mural's interpretation and for its historical impact. Holbein's preparatory drawing shows Henry VIII in the iconic pose now inextricably linked with the famous Tudor king: legs wide apart and arms akimbo, his expansive bodily presence is further emphasized by his bulky costume with the prominent codpiece.¹⁹ Henry holds a glove in one hand, while the other one rests on the chain of his dagger. The king's virile physical appearance is in stark contrast to that of his father who is portrayed as a slender, elderly man almost too small for his voluminous robes. And, while Henry VII gazes out of the painting as if lost in thought, his son looks directly out of the mural in three-quarter profile as if targeting the audience. As a result, Henry VIII appears to be physically and mentally superior to his father as well as to the beholder of the portrait. In the copy, however, this impression is accentuated even further, since the king turns fully to the spectator. His stance, therefore, not only differs from that of his father but also from that of both queens who are depicted in almost identical poses with folded hands and with their eyes and faces turned to the right in the direction of their respective husbands.²⁰ Finally, given that all known contemporary portraits of Henry VIII that were copied from the mural, for example the one in Petworth House (fig. 5), correspond to van Leemput's version in this particular detail,²¹ van Leemput's depiction most certainly seems to reflect the final layout of Holbein's design accurately.

The emphasis of the sovereign's physical appearance is also consistent with the text on the plinth that praises Henry VIII as superior to his father, while it nonetheless acknowledges the latter's major accomplishments as king. As a result, the *Whitehall Mural* has been interpreted primarily – and in my view appropriately – as a commission intended to promote the Tudor dynasty, its genealogy and succession.²² In addition, as regards this function, it was obviously meant to be more than just a family portrait. After all, despite the fact that three other people are part of the composition, the painting distinctly focuses on Henry VIII, who is shown as the victorious and virile ruler of the English kingdom and its church now independent of papal authority.²³ What seems to clash with the idea that Henry VIII's *persona* and body are the explicit focal point of the painting is the fact that his image is quite obviously *not* in the centre of the composition – an aspect that has dominated the extended debate over the accuracy of van Leemput's copy. Initially it led Roy Strong to believe that the central position of the plinth had not been part of the mural's original design. Holbein's decision to place an object in the centre of a painting rather than the main portrait is, of course, not unprecedented in his *oeuvre*: his famous *Ambassadors* immediately spring to mind.²⁴ However, in the context of royal portraiture, the composition is indeed highly unusual and its obvious lack of balance seems to be further enhanced by the architectural setting of the scene. A central arch accompanied by two slightly lower shell-vaulted niches on either side dominates the richly decorated interior in the background of the mural. The niches are framed by four Corinthian pilasters that support a richly ornamented frieze and, above it, carry a ceiling architecture that seems to open up to clear blue skies. As Stephanie Buck has pointed out, the tripartite pattern was most likely an allusion to a triumphal arch or gate of honour and intended to be read in comparison with representative royal architecture such as the famous *Gate of Honour* for Maximilian I (fig. 6).²⁵

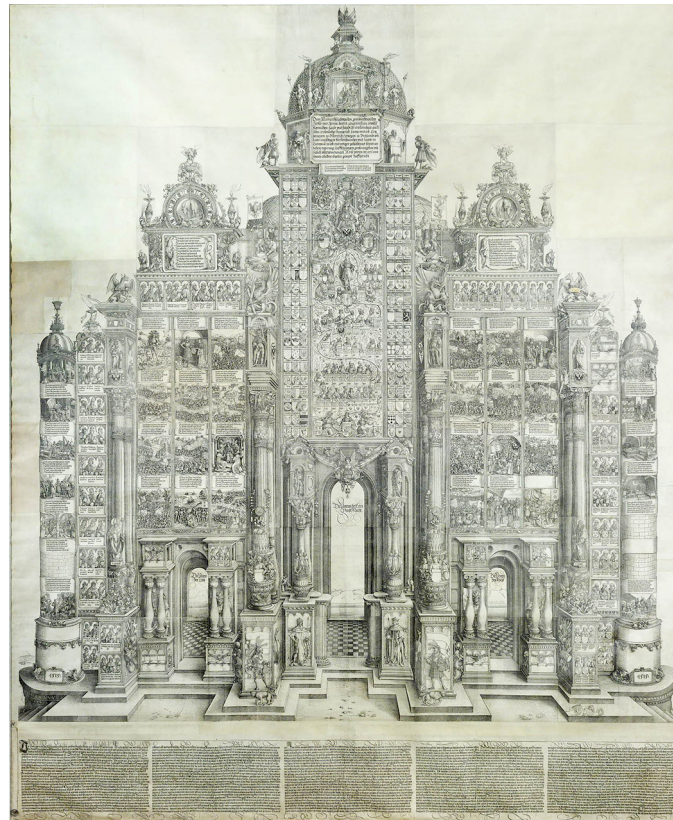


Fig. 6 Albrecht Dürer/Albrecht Altdorfer, *Gate of Honour for Maximilian I*, 1515–1517.

Characteristic of both a triumphal gate and a gate of honour is the hierarchical emphasis on the central axis and therefore on the central arch, which in Holbein's composition is placed directly behind – and above – the inscription on the plinth. This peculiar accentuation of the non-figural centre of the painting along with Holbein's substitution of Henry's three-quarter profile documented in the cartoon by the fully-frontal version shown in van Leemput's copy sparked speculation about the mural's having been specifically intended to interact with elements outside its pictorial space. Thurley and Lloyd assume – rightly in my view – that Holbein's work was 'a display of magnificence', which created an imposing backdrop for the king's actual physical presence – in particular if we imagine him in front of the mural's centre – and thereby it expanded 'the real presence of the ruler into a supernatural one'.²⁶ Within this context, they also mention a much-quoted reference to the *Whitehall Mural* in Karel van Mander's *Het Schilder-Boeck* (1604) to underline the intimidating effect that the king's portrait, and in particular his posture and his direct gaze, must have had on its beholder.²⁷ However, to interpret van Mander's Dutch phrase '*dat een yeder wie't siet verschrickt*'²⁸ as proof that contemporary spectators felt 'abashed and annihilated'²⁹ in front of Henry VIII's portrait is, as Tatiana String only recently clarified, a misinterpretation. She notes that van Mander was referring to the *topos* of Apelles and that his wording in this passage was influenced by Vasari's *Lives*. The astonishment he describes, String maintains, was actually caused by the realism and artistry of Holbein's painting, not by the *persona* of the king himself.³⁰

If one puts the citation into context by reading the complete paragraph in *Het Schilder-Boeck*,³¹ one reveals its actual and no less interesting subject: the *trompe-l'oeil*-effect of the mural, which – and this aspect will be relevant for my argument later on – applied to Henry and to the royal family as well as to the painting's architectural setting.³² As Kent Rawlinson observed, the highly unusual interior in which the Tudor kings and their wives are depicted 'has received surprisingly little attention, although in many respects it defines the character and the composition of the entire image'.³³ Its design was clearly inspired by and, in part, very closely derived from Donato Bramante's *Interior of a Ruined Church or Temple*,³⁴ which – in the version of a print by Bernardo Prevedari (fig. 7) – might also have been part of Henry's extensive art collection.³⁵ The architecture in the background of the *Whitehall Mural* with its elaborated symbolism of laurel-adorned emperors' heads, heraldic animals of the Tudor coat of arms and the sophisticated ornamentation must indeed, as Rawlinson suggests, be understood as an architecturally encoded metaphor complementing the message conveyed by the inscription on the plinth and by the group portrait of the family. Holbein's composition hence orchestrates Henry as a ruler with all the 'refined virtues of [a] truly Renaissance prince'³⁶ – intellectual and physical strength as well as a classical cultural and military education – and this statement was very probably made in competition with contemporary European leaders and patrons of the arts such as Francis I or Charles V.³⁷



Fig. 7 Bernardo Prevedari, Print after Bramante's *Interior of a Ruined Church or Temple*, Milan, 1481.

However, as Roy Strong had remarked in his very first study of the *Whitehall Mural*, apart from its meaningful allusions to antiquity, the painting's spatial setting also directly corresponds to the interior decoration of Whitehall Palace. The frieze with mermaids and mermen, for example, was probably derived from the design of the actual panelling – remnants of the same or comparable ornamentation can still be found in the so-called Wolsey Closet in Hampton Court (fig. 8).³⁸ Considering this facet and keeping in mind the painting's *trompe-l'oeil* effect in connection with the assumption that its overall layout was at least to some extent devised to interact with elements outside its pictorial space, I would like to open up Rawlinson's argument. In my view, the spatial setting of the *Whitehall Mural* is a major key to understanding its message. However, this spatial setting was fundamentally defined by elements both within and outside the painting itself. Consequently, in order to analyze the meaning of the space depicted in the mural, it is essential to incorporate a meticulous analysis of the space for which it was commissioned and in which it was intended to be displayed.

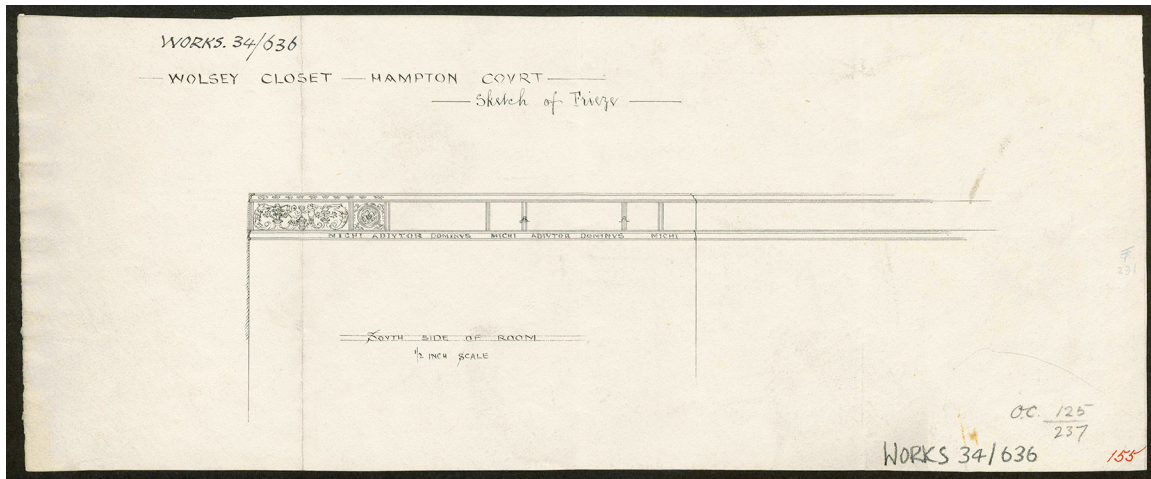


Fig. 8 Sketch of the frieze at the so-called Wolsey Closet at Hampton Court, 1889.

The King's Privy Chamber

Unfortunately, the only source that mentions the exact location of the *Whitehall Mural* within the layout of the royal apartments is over a hundred years younger than the painting itself. John Evelyn reports in his diary on 11 February 1656:

I ventured to go to Whitehall, where of many years I had not been, and found it very glorious and well furnished, as far as I could safely go, and was glad to find they had not much defaced that rare peace of Henry 7th & Henry 8th &c done on the walles of the King's privy chamber.³⁹

Simon Thurley's extensive research on the architectural history of Whitehall Palace and of the royal apartments has determined that 'the King's privy chamber' of Evelyn's time corresponds indeed to the king's privy chamber during the Tudor period; its function and denomination did not change until the palace went up in flames in 1698.⁴⁰ To understand the impact of this finding – namely that Henry had obviously commissioned the mural for this particular room – the arrangement of the royal apartments in Whitehall needs some clarification.

In April 1531 – in the same year in which the Venetian ambassador reported on the king's impressive new building site at York Place – the first foundations for the new royal residence at Whitehall were excavated.⁴¹ The palace's layout – which, according to the ambassador's statement, had been planned by Henry VIII himself – contained several significant modifications compared to the traditional English royal accommodation. As Simon Thurley points out, the layout introduced at Whitehall palace was 'highly innovative and was not only to provide the model for the remaining sixteen years of Henry VIII's reign, but one which was to last well into the eighteenth century'.⁴² Here, for the very first time and probably in imitation of Francis I's project in Fontainebleau, the king abandoned the traditional donjon structure in which representative and private rooms were positioned on top of each other.⁴³ Instead, he kept the succession of these so-called 'outward' and 'inward' chambers on one level and he significantly increased their size and number. Under the reign of his father Henry VII, the suite of the king's apartments had consisted of the guard or watching chamber where the sovereign's palace guard was stationed to protect his lodgings, of the presence chamber accommodating the throne and canopy and of the privy chamber that was connected directly with the king's bedchamber.⁴⁴ Having adopted this layout in the early years of his reign, Henry VIII used the enlarged building site at Whitehall to separate his privy chamber and his bedchamber by the insertion of four additional rooms. Behind the bedchamber, five rooms and a gallery were added (fig. 9).⁴⁵

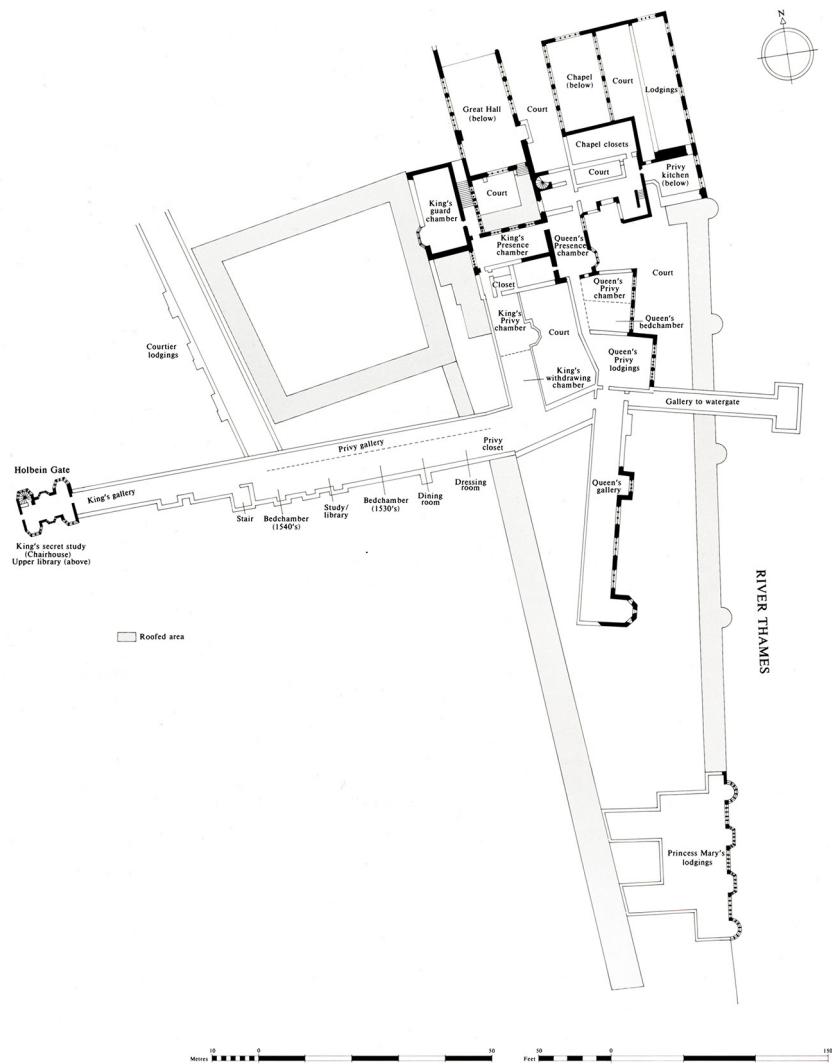


Fig. 9 Reconstruction of the first-floor plan of Whitehall Palace in 1547.

Only little sustainable information about size and décor of the Whitehall privy chamber can be gleaned from the remaining archaeological and documentary evidence, but there are estimates that it was about 7 m wide.⁴⁶ The Duke of Saxe-Weimar categorized it as 'small', but noted that it was elegantly furnished with paintings and tapestries.⁴⁷ Around the same time that Holbein must have started work on his mural, Niccoló Bellin da Modena – who had previously been employed as a stucco plasterer at Fontainebleau – received his first payment for the refitting of fireplaces in Henry's palaces.⁴⁸ Since there was definitely a fireplace in the privy chamber, we can assume that its redecoration was one of Modena's first tasks.⁴⁹ Within this context, it is an interesting coincidence that one of the four surviving interior designs initially attributed to Modena, an elaborate chimneypiece (fig. 10), has since been convincingly credited to Holbein.⁵⁰



Fig. 10 Hans Holbein the Younger, *Design for a Chimneypiece*, London, c. 1538–1540.

Since it is plausible that the Italian plasterer and the German painter were working simultaneously on the decorations of the privy chamber, maybe Holbein's drawing of the chimneypiece is a clue to the fact that they even worked together to some extent. Further information on the chamber's actual layout may be gained from yet another drawing, depicting Henry VIII and his courtiers in a room that likely functioned as privy chamber (fig. 11).



Fig. 11 School of Hans Holbein the Younger, *Henry VIII in his Privy Chamber*. London, c.1548.

The drawing was probably based on a sketch by Holbein,⁵¹ but certainly does not portray the privy chamber in Whitehall, since neither the bay window on its southern side nor the mural itself actually appear in the drawing. However, the interior scene in which Henry is attended by his courtiers shows a rather plain cupboard on which vases and porcelain vessels are placed. The so-called Eltham Ordinances – the regulations for the royal household documented in writing at Eltham in 1526 – mention that usually a cupboard was placed in the privy chamber,⁵² which means that the Whitehall privy chamber was most likely equipped with one as well. In any case, we can assume that a luxurious selection of tapestries and panelling, an elaborate fireplace, a narrow cupboard and – in accordance with Holbein's drawing – a table and chair were part of the privy chamber's furnishings at Whitehall. The matter of the canopy is, however, less clear: although Henry is depicted in the mentioned drawing as seated under a lavishly decorated baldachin in front of the cloth of estate, evidence shows that this particular piece of furnishing was normally the most essential part of the presence chamber.⁵³ The so-called 'chair of estate' – the throne on a raised

dais under the canopy and in front of the cloth of estate – represented an object of high symbolic value and is frequently mentioned as such in contemporary sources.⁵⁴ The chair, for example, was not to be touched or approached too closely; courtiers had to take off their hats and bow in front of it at all times – even when the throne was unoccupied and the king was not present in the room.⁵⁵ Thus, a canopy was probably not part of the privy chamber's permanent decoration,⁵⁶ but it is possible to imagine one being added occasionally when the room had to be adapted to a more representative function. The *Whitehall Mural* itself must have been positioned on the southern wall of the room, opposite the entrance from the small gallery next to the closet and immediately facing those entering the chamber.⁵⁷ Since it was narrower than the wall for which it was commissioned and there had to be a passageway or a door leading to the adjacent withdrawing chamber, the mural was probably surrounded by panelling and/or tapestry, under or behind of which the passage to the rear inward chambers was located.

The Space of the Privy Chamber

It becomes apparent that to support a constitutive reconstruction of Henry VIII's privy chamber, these rather fragmentary, material-oriented archaeological and art-historical findings are illustrative but not sufficient. I would, therefore, like to add the intended audience of the painting to my considerations of the *Whitehall Mural's* spatial setting. The question for whom the painting was created has always been part of its scholarly analysis. Roy Strong, for instance, presumed that it was a key element of iconic Tudor propaganda,⁵⁸ a statement dismissed by Lloyd and Thurley based on the fact that the mural's position within the king's lodgings only permitted access to a restricted and selected few.⁵⁹ In addition, Rawlinson and String noted that in terms of communication, the painting with its allusive and ambitious iconography was distinctly directed at and only comprehensible for a highly sophisticated audience.⁶⁰ I would like to underpin their findings by arguing that the painting's target audience as well as the interior decoration of the privy chamber and the location of the mural within the royal lodgings at Whitehall was an integral part of its spatial setting. My suggestion is based on an understanding of space that is opposed to the concept of space as container as proposed for example by Newton, but rather defines its nature as relative and subject-oriented. I will, therefore, analyze the spatial setting of the *Whitehall Mural* applying Martina Löw's concept of a sociology of space. According to Löw – whose systematic approach takes into account the works of both spatial and social theorists such as Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault and Anthony Giddens – space is the relational order of potentially moving objects, which she denotes as *bodies* ('Körper').⁶¹ These bodies are the constituent elements of space and can be separated into the categories of *living entities* and *social goods*.⁶² *Social goods* are defined as either being primarily material (for example tables, chairs, architecture or any other object that in one way or another has a 'materialised' existence within our world), or as primarily symbolic, which is the case for songs, values, traditions, regulations, ideas, etc. The latter may take a defined form through writing in legislative texts or treatises but they also exist without a concrete materiality. Löw uses the term 'primarily' to emphasize the fact that social goods can

never be exclusively material or symbolic; for her, they always exhibit both components, but in most cases, one of the two is dominant.⁶³ This dichotomy becomes evident if we use Löw's example of the chair, which she comprehensibly defines as a primarily material social good.⁶⁴ However, if we consider the abovementioned characteristics of Henry's 'chair of estate', we must also categorize it as a symbolic social good in equal measure. During the reign of the Tudor kings, its symbolic impact may have superseded its material properties, since its conceptual meaning may have defined it even more closely than its physical existence. Apart from primarily material and primarily symbolic social goods, space is also determined by *living entities*, that is, in the case of the mural in question, by human beings.⁶⁵ Space according to Löw is, therefore, 'constituted' by the relational order of people and social goods in which the movement of the elements is probably at some point involved. However, there is no space unless its bodies actively connect, which happens by means of two essential processes that Löw names *spacing* and *synthesis*.⁶⁶ She defines *spacing* as situating or positioning people and social goods and, therefore, as creation of the relational order between the elements or bodies of spatial constitution. Hence, it refers to both the act of positioning as well as the movement towards the next position. In the already cited report of the Duke of Najera's visit to Whitehall written by his secretary Pedro de Gante (see note 54), the positioning of guards in the watching chamber and the installation of the chair of estate in the presence chamber are to be interpreted as the result of an act of spacing: they significantly define the space of the chambers in which they are situated. De Gante accordingly characterizes the chambers he traverses by the social goods, or respectively the living entities, that play the most important role in their constitution and, therefore, most significantly define their spatial relevance in his eyes. The movement of Don Rodrigo de Mendoza and Tello de Guzman alongside their courtiers through the succession of 'outward' chambers and the fact that only Mendoza and Guzman are allowed to proceed into the 'inward' chambers by entering Henry VIII's privy chamber must also be understood as an act of spacing: the regulation of movement and the positioning of the Duke of Najera and his courtiers determines their role in the constitution of a space of which the king himself is a constitutive element. In this case, we discuss highly ritualized acts of spacing: positioning and movement are regulated as part of a ceremonial orchestration. In addition to positioning and movement, *spacing* also describes the act of rendering ensembles of goods and people recognizable as a distinctive space by using primarily symbolic markings.⁶⁷ When remodeling York Place, Henry turned Wolsey's pre-existing buildings and his newly constructed apartments into an architectural ensemble that was definitely in his possession. Even though he preserved a considerable portion of the original architecture and furnishings – for example, he continued to use Wolsey's guard chamber in its original layout and function⁶⁸ – he eliminated every symbolic reference to their previous owner, replacing it with symbolic markings of his own. In the case of the guard chamber, he installed a (subsequently gilded) coat of arms supported by a stone dragon.⁶⁹ These – deliberate or non-deliberate – acts of spacing and the resulting relational order of people and social goods were to be experienced, as becomes evident in the report about the visit of the Duke of Najera. This experience is defined by Löw as the process of *synthesis*.⁷⁰ Synthesis describes the act of connecting people and social goods into forming a space

through ideation, perception or recall. The two latter processes can be observed in the case of Pedro de Gante who first perceives the constitution of space during his visit at the court of Henry VIII, then recalls it and even materializes it in writing. We, to the contrary, have to use our imagination to synthesize the space described by de Gante as a virtual space in our minds to get the idea. Thus the constitution of *space* according to Löw takes place by the relational ordering of *people* and *social goods* through the process of *spacing* – that is by the positioning and marking of goods and people – and of *synthesizing* – i.e. by perceiving, recalling or envisioning the order of the elements as a particular space. Another crucial element of Löw's approach is the distinction between *space* and *place*.⁷¹ While *spaces* can exist virtually, for example in someone's memory or even in his or her imagination, the term *place* refers to an area with a distinct geographic location that can be clearly identified and delineated and which most likely has been named. In fact, a distinctive name is a fundamental characteristic of a place, since it enhances its symbolical quality.⁷² Within this context, Löw quotes Albert Einstein, who likewise defined a place as a 'small portion of the earth's surface identified by name'.⁷³ If spaces are not virtually constituted – i.e. remembered or imagined – but perceived, they need to be constituted in places. In this case, the relationally ordered people and goods as well as the place(s) are not perceived separately but rather synthesized as one spatial entity by the beholder. Depending on cultural, psychological, topological, social or historical conditions, the same elements within the same place may be perceived as diverse spaces by different beholders. The moment one adds the factor of time, an indefinite number of spaces may be constituted in one place, induced by the fact that the constitutive elements of space – including at least the beholder – are bound to change. This can be illustrated by the above-mentioned report of John Evelyn in which he describes the *Whitehall Mural* as part of the king's privy chamber. His account has long been dismissed as proof of the actual position of the painting within the layout of Henry's lodgings because the term 'privy chamber' was known as a term that did not necessarily denote one particular place but rather referred to a specific space that could exist in several places – for example in diverse palaces – and even change its geographical position within one palace depending on particular circumstances. Even now, despite the fact we know that the 'king's privy chamber' was situated in the same place from the remodelling of the royal lodgings by Henry in 1531 to the fire of 1698, it is clear that the space of the privy chamber must have changed continuously after and even during Henry's reign. In what follows, I will show that it did change fundamentally.

As has already been noted, during the time of Henry VII, the privy chamber had been directly connected to the sovereign's bedroom and functioned as a predominantly private space where the king would retire from official business and work or dine alone.⁷⁴ The interior would therefore have been quite modest. Although we can assume that there was also a chair, a writing table or lectern, a fireplace and even tapestries, this furniture was probably more functional than representative. A fundamental part of this interior would have been – even if not permanently so – the eponymous privy or stool, which was under the care of the so-called groom of the stool who merely held the rank of a gentleman. Apart from the king, only six further grooms – some-

times of even lower rank – had access to the room.⁷⁵ Under Henry VIII, the post of the groom of the stool still included cleaning and other menial duties, which meant that no high-ranking men applied for the post. This changed in 1515 when Francis I came to power in France and rearranged the positions of his courtiers. During his early reign, the title 'gentilhomme de la chambre' was established and immediately associated with a very respectable and intimate position among the king's entourage. The English court adopted and translated the title on the occasion of Francis's visit to England in 1518. Henry's courtiers had to be appointed to a comparable status in order to be paired with their French peers for ceremonial purposes; thereby the 'gentlemen of the privy chamber' were instituted.⁷⁶ The change of rank went hand in hand with a development described by David Starkey as the 'rise of the privy chamber',⁷⁷ during which this initially private retreat was increasingly opened to members of the court who thereby gained considerable administrative, ceremonial and representative influence. According to the *Eltham Ordinances* of 1526, instead of the six grooms listed under the groom of the stool, there were now six gentlemen of the privy chamber, four grooms, two ushers, a page and a barber who were allowed access to this formerly most private royal refuge. By 1530 – during the construction of the new and expanded lodgings at Whitehall – the number of people with right of access had increased to twenty and by 1539 to twenty-eight.⁷⁸ In addition to these still very select members of the court, even foreign ambassadors – if only those of the highest rank – were sometimes received by the king inside his privy chamber. Such a reception is, for example, documented for 18 April 1536 when the imperial ambassador Chapuys visited Henry at Greenwich. Chapuys was received outside the presence chamber and, after having been acknowledged by the king who then went to dine with Anne Boleyn in her lodgings, remained seated in the presence chamber to eat with 'all the principal men of the court'. Subsequently, as Chapuys wrote, Henry, 'in passing by where I was made me the same caress as in the morning, and, taking me by the hand, led me into his [privy] chamber, whither only the Chancellor and Cromwell followed. He took me apart to a window' to discuss the current international situation.⁷⁹ As we can gather from these reports, even after the layout of the royal apartment had changed and became increasingly accessible to the members of the court, the privy chamber was still used and perceived as a predominantly private space to which only a very select few obtained access. De Gante's disappointed reaction when he was denied access to this chamber and Chapuys' description of his reception illustrate the high degree of intimacy associated with it. Passing the privy chamber's threshold was obviously synthesized as passing into another, hierarchically more distinguished space, which was constituted and hence defined by an exclusive propinquity to the king's physical presence. As Starkey astutely sums up, this very 'nearness – intimacy – was the key to the Privy Chamber's importance'.⁸⁰ In contrast to his father's custom, Henry VIII kept his courtiers and political allies close, both in a figurative and in a literal sense. However, this intimacy – in which spatial proximity played an integral part – could be a mixed blessing. The king, wishing to expand his power and to secure his dynastic succession, had put himself in an extremely difficult diplomatic position when he banned his first wife Catherine of Aragon, proceeded to marry Anne Boleyn and, subsequently, declared himself head of the Church of England by the Act of Supremacy in 1534. While Henry struggled to keep the upper hand in

diverse resulting diplomatic and military conflicts during the following years, factions distributed throughout the country and even at court fought over power and influence, each of them pursuing their own religious, political and personal agenda. In 1536 – the year the *Whitehall Mural* was commissioned – this contest reached its climax when Anne Boleyn miscarried and those members of the privy chamber who had supported the now deceased Catherine of Aragon saw their chance to replace the queen with Jane Seymour.⁸¹ They conspired with their former adversary Cromwell, who thereupon helped Henry in his plot against Anne. This plot resulted in the well-known accusations of adultery, incest and high treason that ultimately led to the queen's execution on 2 May 1536. Two days prior to her beheading, her brother George Boleyn, gentleman of the privy chamber, Henry Norris, groom of the stool, and three other members of the privy chamber had already been executed, charged as Anne's alleged lovers and as conspirators against the Crown.⁸²

Conclusion: The Commissioning of the Whitehall Mural as an Act of Spacing

In sum, I would like to propose the commission of the *Whitehall Mural* just a few months after these events and during one of the most dangerous military uprisings of Henry's reign – the so-called 'Pilgrimage of Grace'⁸³ – to be interpreted as a deliberate and purposeful act of spacing with the intention to alter the constitution of space inside the privy chamber at Whitehall Palace. By having named those members of the court most intimately connected to him 'gentlemen of the privy chamber' and by simultaneously giving them a considerable amount of political influence and power during the earlier years of his reign, the king had raised them closer to his own rank and thus 'rendered' the space of his privy chamber into their place to be in and to be synthesized with. Consequently, whenever the relationship between the sovereign and his courtiers turned sour, there was no other space within the palace where Henry would have been more exposed to the proximity of potential enemies and in which he was so often severely outnumbered. The installation of the mural, however, added numerous elements to the constitution of space within the privy chamber that changed the room's spatial setting in his favour.

First of all, it duplicated the body of the king by means of his portrait. Thus, it added the sovereign's presence permanently to the constitution of the privy chamber's space, but not on a symbolical level – like the 'chair of estate' in the presence chamber – but rather through his illusionistic but naturalistic likeness. Similarly, the portraits of Jane Seymour and of Henry's parents in their life-like and deceptive quality as described by van Mander might with hindsight be interpreted as a substitute for their actual physical presence; they could thereby be integrated into the constitution of space in the function of actual human beings. The painting's composition, especially the design of its architectural setting, clearly marked – as outlined above – a distinctive and definite place for the king outside its pictorial space. When Henry was actually present in the privy chamber and was – as is likely – positioned in front of the mural, Holbein's elaborate iconography with all its symbolic and illusionistic qualities would indeed have served as a kind of backdrop⁸⁴ that intensified the physical presence of the sovereign and, thus, his spatial impact within the privy chamber. In his absence, however, the non-figural centre of the painting illustrated the

spatial void caused by the lack of the sovereign's physique for which the plinth alone could not function as a surrogate. To the contrary, its dominating position in the middle of the triumphant composition and the verses in praise of the sovereign's grandeur rather explicitly pointed out that Henry was *not* there. This impression still lingers in the mural's small-scale copy and remains perceivable even for the contemporary beholder; a fact that prompted the above-mentioned debate about the accuracy of van Leemput's account of Holbein's work.

Beyond the fact that the *Whitehall Mural* enhanced Henry's presence and definitely marked his place within the privy chamber, it first and foremost created its own virtual space and added it to the room's actual space. By repeating in an illusionistic way architectural elements of the chamber's interior such as the panelling while simultaneously integrating them into an improbable imaginary architecture that is open to the skies, Holbein created a spatial hybridity within the painting. This hybridity between real and fantastic architecture made it possible to link the virtual, utopian space inside the painting – which was constituted by the members of the royal family as a timeless triumphal entity and created a place of power and authority, which never existed as such in the real world – with the actual space inside the privy chamber. This enabled Henry to be synthesized by the beholder as part of the mural's pictorial space while at the same time every other person present would have been excluded as a constituent of this same space. The mural thus established two hierarchically tiered spaces, 'rendering' one of them exclusively as Henry's own and thereby creating two different spaces in one place. The space within the painting was, much more than that of the privy chamber, strictly off limits: only members of the royal family – in fact, only members of the royal Tudor family descending from the four people depicted in the painting – could be allowed access, which decidedly eliminated Henry's daughters Mary and Elizabeth. The only descendant fit to take the king's place in the context of the mural would in fact have been Edward; since he was the only child of Henry and Jane, he represented Henry's only legitimate male heir within the iconology of the painting. Remigius van Leemput obviously thought along the same lines when he created another copy of the *Whitehall Mural* in which he placed a portrait of Edward directly in front of the plinth (fig. 12).



Fig. 12 Remigius van Leemput, *Copy of the Whitehall Mural with Edward VI*, Petworth House, 1669.

In conclusion, I suggest that one of the main functions of the *Whitehall Mural* – apart from its clear function as a triumphal orchestration of the king as well as a celebration of the Tudor dynasty – was to generate a shift in the privy chamber's spatial hierarchy in Henry VIII's favour. It meant to create both a select place and a distinctly rendered space in which only the king was a constituent element. Holbein's painting can therefore be read as an expression of Henry's desire for a more distant relationship with his courtiers – in particular with the gentlemen of the privy chamber. This wish is reflected even more explicitly in Henry's subsequent acts of spacing at Whitehall Palace: as Simon Thurley has established for the years after 1540, the king – as a consequence of his privy lodgings being frequented by more and more courtiers – did in fact 'retreat once more, this time into a newly set up and extended secret lodgings' during the last decade of his reign since his privy lodgings were 'hardly "privy" any longer'.⁸⁵ Consequently, I question the argument suggested by Lloyd and Thurley that

perhaps because of the power of the mural that in the 1540s there appears to have been a gradual opening up of the privy chamber at Whitehall. The room was increasingly used in preference to the presence chamber for important court occasions, and Henry began to adopt rooms in the privy gallery beyond as his private domain.⁸⁶

Rather than being the cause of this process of opening up a private space, I would argue that Holbein's monumental wall painting was a deliberate and intentional reaction to it, marking one of Henry's steps towards a spatial retreat from his court within Whitehall Palace.

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¹ For an extensive and meticulously referenced building history, for archaeological details and historical background, see Thurley 1993; Thurley 1999 and Thurley 2008.

² Thurley 1993, pp. 48–51. Thurley 1999, p. 39. Thurley 2008, p. 25.

³ See Thurley 1999, p. 37. Thurley cites the *Calendar of Letters, Documents and State Papers relating to Negotiations between England and Spain preserved in the Archives at Simancas and elsewhere*, ed. Bergenroth, de Goyangos, Mattingly and Tyler 1862–1965 for the years 1527–1533, nr. 664. Insertions in brackets are by Thurley.

⁴ Thurley 1999, p. 37.

⁵ Thurley 1993, p. 54.

⁶ Thurley 1993, p. 54.

⁷ Waldstein 1981, p. 43; see also Thurley 1999, p. 48.

⁸ See Thurley 1999, pp. 82–90.

⁹ PROTOTYPUM IUSTAE MAGNITUDINIS IPSO OPERE TECTORIO/FECIT HOLBENIUS IUBENTE HENRICO VIII./ECTYPUM A REMIGIO VAN LEEMPUT BREVIORI TABELLA/DESCRIBI VOLVIT CAROLUS II: M.B.F.E.H.R. A°DNI MDCLXVII.

¹⁰ Translation in Foister et al. 2006, p. 94.

¹¹ Strong 1967, pp. 49–50.

¹² Strong 1967, p. 50. Strong's translation is based on Patin's *Quatre Relations Historiques*, 1673, pp. 211–12.

¹³ Foister 1981. For an overview of the subject see Buck 1997, pp. 104–06.

¹⁴ Waldstein 1981, p. 57: 'In another room Henry VII and VIII and their wives are painted. [...] The following lines can be read here: *Si iuvat Heroum claras vidisse figuras, Specta has: maiores nulla tabella tulit. Certamen magnum, lis, quaestio magna: paterne Filius an vincat, vicit uterque quidem? Ipse suos hostes patriyeque incendia soepe Sustulit, et pacem civibus usque dedit; Filius ad maiora quidem prognatus, ab aulis Submovet indignos, substituitque probos. Verte virtuti Papparum audacia cessit, Henrico octavo sceptru gerente manu. Reddita rilligio est isto regnante, Delque Dogmata ceperunt esse in honore suo.*' See also Thurley 1999, p. 48 and Buck 1997, p. 105.

¹⁵ Buck 1997, p. 120.

¹⁶ For a detailed account of the cartoon, see Buck 1997, pp. 109–19.

¹⁷ Thurley 1993, p. 211.

¹⁸ Foister 2004, pp. 183–90. See also Buck 1997, pp. 189–90 and Brooke 2003, p. 29.

¹⁹ See, for example, Brooke 2003, p. 9 and Sharpe 2009, p. 136. Roy Strong rightly linked Henry's posture to the *St. George* by Donatello (c.1420, executed for the exterior of Orsanmichele in Florence) and to several other works of Italian Renaissance sculpture which represent 'knightly triumph'; Strong 1967, 42.

²⁰ This change of design has also been the subject of some debate; see, for example, Buck 1997, pp. 193–95; Foister et al. 2006, p. 94 and Brooke 2003, pp. 32–35.

²¹ For extensive research on the portrait's history of reception and on its copies, see Brooke and Crombie 2003.

²² Foister 2004, pp. 182–84. Sharpe 2009, pp. 135–37. String 2008, pp. 29–39.

²³ Sharpe 2009, p. 136 and Brooke 2003, pp. 30–34.

²⁴ Buck 1997, pp. 167–78.

²⁵ Buck 1997, pp. 192–93.

²⁶ Lloyd and Thurley 1990, p. 29.

²⁷ Xanthe Brooke comes to the same conclusion; see Brooke 2003. p. 34.

²⁸ Van Mander 1969, f. 222r.

²⁹ Lloyd and Thurley 1990, p. 29. Strong 1967, p. 39 first mentions the translation in this context.

³⁰ String 2013, pp. 134–35.

³¹ *'Aengaende de wercken van Holbein voor den Coning ghedaen, hy heeft seer uytnemende ghemaect t'conterfeytsel van den Coning Henrick de achste ten voeten uyt, so groot als t'leven, soo gheheel levendigh, dat een yeder wie't siet verschrickt: want het schijnt dat het leeft, en datmen t'hoofd en alle de leden natuerlijck siet bewegen en roeren. Dit is noch te sien te Withal, een werck dat zijn Meester prijst, en ghetuyght eenen anderen Apelles te zijn gheweest'*. [Concerning the works Holbein created for the king, he made a very extraordinary portrait of King Henry the Eighth, ten feet high, life-sized, so entirely animate that every-one looking at it is startled: because it seems to be alive, and that you can see the head and limbs move and stir naturally. It can still be seen at Whitehall, a work praising its master and testifying on him having been a second Apelles]; van Mander 1969, f. 222r. Translated from the Dutch by the author, a similar translation can be found in String 2013, p. 135.

³² Foister and Rawlinson also pointed out the likely illusionistic effect of the mural in combination with the rest of the – maybe even complementarily designed – interior. See Foister 2004, pp. 181–82; Rawlinson 2013, p. 106.

³³ Rawlinson 2013, p. 106.

³⁴ Rawlinson 2013, p. 107. Rawlinson remarks that Ganz had first recognized Holbein's use of Bramante's design in 1950. He also disagrees that 'the setting is more than "closely copied" from it' [as Starkey and Grosvenor 2007 suggested]; rather he suggests that Holbein 'selectively quotes from and completely recasts Bramante's design'.

³⁵ Rawlinson 2013, pp. 108–09.

³⁶ Sharpe 2009, p. 136.

³⁷ See also Buck 1997, pp. 192–93.

³⁸ Strong 1967, p. 50–52. Foister 2004, p. 180.

³⁹ *The Diary of John Evelyn*, 11 February 1656 is partly quoted in Thurley 1999, p. 48.

⁴⁰ Thurley 1999. He documents his findings on p. 48.

- ⁴¹ Regarding the architectural history of Whitehall Palace, I have mainly drawn on Thurley 1993 and Thurley 1999.
- ⁴² Thurley 1993, p. 136.
- ⁴³ Thurley 1993, p. 53.
- ⁴⁴ Starkey 1987, pp. 73–74. Thurley 1993, pp. 135–43. Buck 1997, pp. 107–08.
- ⁴⁵ Thurley 1993, p. 136 and plan 13.
- ⁴⁶ Thurley 1999, p. 49.
- ⁴⁷ Foister 2004, p. 180.
- ⁴⁸ Foister 2004, p. 181. Thurley 1993, p. 107. Thurley quotes a letter from John Wallop to Henry VIII in which he describes Francis I's gallery in Fontainebleau as 'all antique of suche stuff as the said modon maketh your majesties chemenyes'.
- ⁴⁹ Foister 2004, p. 181.
- ⁵⁰ Foister 2004, p. 180.
- ⁵¹ Rowlands 1993, I, p. 177.
- ⁵² *Ordinances*, p. 157 (Cap. 67).
- ⁵³ Brooke 2003, p. 26. Starkey 1987, p. 73.
- ⁵⁴ Thurley, for example, quotes the report of the Duke of Najera's visit to Henry VIII at Whitehall in 1544: 'Before the Duke arrived at the King's chamber he passed through three saloons, hung with tapestry, in the second of which [the watching chamber] were stationed in order on either side the King's bodyguard, dressed in habits of red, and holding halberds. In the third saloon [the presence chamber] were nobles, knights and gentlemen, and here was a canopy made of rich figured brocade, with a chair of the same material [...] here the brother of the Queen and other noblemen entertained the Duke for a quarter of an hour until it was announced that we should enter the chamber of the King [the privy chamber]. Don Rodrigo de Mendoza and Tello de Guzman entered with him and no one else, nor did they permit us even to see the King.' Thurley 1993, pp. 127–28. Explanatory brackets by Thurley.
- ⁵⁵ Thurley 1993, p. 122, cites: 'no manner of whatsoever degree he be of so hardye to come nighe the kings chayre nor stand under the clothe of estate.'; see also Brooke 2003, p. 26.
- ⁵⁶ Foister 2004, p. 180.
- ⁵⁷ Thurley 1999, p. 49.
- ⁵⁸ Strong 1967, p. 44
- ⁵⁹ Lloyd and Thurley 1990, p. 29.
- ⁶⁰ String 2008, pp. 29–30. Rawlinson 2013, p. 107.
- ⁶¹ Löw 2001, p. 152. See also Löw 2008, which is the English-language summary of her theories. I adopt her translations for the terminology used in this essay.
- ⁶² Löw 2001, pp. 153–57.
- ⁶³ Löw 2001, p. 153.
- ⁶⁴ Löw 2001, p. 153.
- ⁶⁵ Löw 2001, pp. 153–54.
- ⁶⁶ Löw 2001, pp. 158–61.
- ⁶⁷ Löw 2001, p. 158.

⁶⁸ Thurley 1999, p. 47.

⁶⁹ Thurley 1999, p. 47.

⁷⁰ Löw 2001, p. 159.

⁷¹ Löw 2001, pp. 198–203.

⁷² Löw 2001, p. 199.

⁷³ Löw 2008, p. 42.

⁷⁴ Buck 1997, p. 108.

⁷⁵ As David Starkey describes it: 'The servants of the privy chamber (the groom of the stool and half a dozen other grooms) were of distinctly lower status than the king, different from the premier valet and the valets in France or the *sommelier de corps* and his servants in Burgundy. This model granted more privacy, like the similar circumstances in the household of the Italian princelings, and therefore was also a way to establish and keep distance'. Starkey 1987, p. 74.

⁷⁶ See Starkey 1987, pp. 81–82.

⁷⁷ Starkey 1987, 1977.

⁷⁸ Thurley 1993, p. 137.

⁷⁹ Thurley 1993, p. 127, brackets by Thurley.

⁸⁰ Starkey 1987, p. 71. By the term 'Privy Chamber', Starkey is mainly referring to the members of the Privy Chamber, not to the chamber itself.

⁸¹ The motivations and correlations of the Boleyn Affair are of course still a matter of debate. In my account, I draw on David Starkey's analysis; see Starkey 1987, pp. 110–15.

⁸² Francis Weston (gentleman of the privy chamber), William Brereton (groom of the privy chamber) and Mark Smeaton (groom of the privy chamber).

⁸³ To a certain extent, this uprising can also be interpreted as a result of the ongoing intrigues at court. In its aftermath three further gentlemen of the privy chamber were executed, namely Edward Neville (gentleman of the privy chamber), Henry Courtenay, Marquess of Exeter (gentleman of the privy chamber) and Nicholas Carew (gentleman of the privy chamber and knight of the garter); see Starkey 1987, p. 112.

⁸⁴ As was proposed by Lloyd and Thurley 1990, p. 29.

⁸⁵ Thurley 1993, pp. 137–38. Comparable observations can also be made for Hampton Court, see Thurley 1993, pp. 51–56, in particular p. 52.

⁸⁶ Lloyd and Thurley 1990, p. 29.